HIRAM GOLF'S RELIGION

BY

GEORGE H. HEPWORTH

JOHN AND HIRAM.

HIRAM GOLF'S RELIGION

OR, THE

"SHOEMAKER BY THE GRACE OF GOD"

BY

GEORGE H. HEPWORTH

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE BEYOND," "ROCKS AND SHOALS," ETC.

FORTY-THIRD THOUSAND

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVE.

Copyright, 1893
by
E. P. DUTTON & CO.

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

CONTENTS.

I.

PAGE

SHOES AND SERMONS 1

II.

THE SPOKES AND THE HUB OF THE WHEEL..... 22

III.

"FEARIN' AND TREMBLIN'."..... 43

IV.

FEW DUTIES, MANY PRIVILEGES..... 59

V.

IS IT A VALE OF TEARS?..... 75

VI.

"A LITTLE MAN SAVIN' SOULS."..... 94

VII.

FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN 106

HIRAM GOLF'S RELIGION.

I.

SHOES AND SERMONS.

THE Cheroquee flows hard by the little village of Woodbine. It is a sluggish, shallow stream, which takes life easily, if not lazily, shelters a few varieties of fish, furnishes to adventurous boys as many pink and white lilies as they can carry home, and after meandering through a dozen dales and cranberry meadows

drops into the welcoming arms of the Atlantic, fifty miles away.

It always reminds me of Pope's lines:

> "Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
> And the smoother stream in smoother numbers flows."

It is pellucid, alluring, full of murmuring music, and runs dimpling all the way, kissing its banks with continuous good-nature.

Of a summer afternoon it serves as a mirror for the fleecy clouds that linger overhead, more than half conscious of the admiration they excite; and there is an indefinable charm in its rippling current as it curls up against the piers of the rickety old wooden bridge, whose boards are so loose that they rattle when the farmer's wagon rumbles over them, and the farmer's horse picks his way on the road to market. At the setting of the sun the reflection of the overhanging trees on the farther bank and of the arched sky which is above us all is something marvelous to behold. There is nothing left of beauty to desire. One looks into its

depths, and sees such a picture as artists dream of but never paint. Many a time I have wandered along its green banks and gazed at two worlds, one above and the other below, until the deepening shadows drove me home, full of pleasant thoughts.

The village of Woodbine consists mainly of a single street, stretching a mile from north to south, on either side of which are the stores, the churches, and the cottages of a majority of the people. Back of this, and nearer the river, are the houses of a score or two of families, who earn a precarious living as best they can. There is the carpenter, and the blacksmith, and the painter, and the tinman, and just at the corner where two roads meet, the little domicile of Hiram Golf, the shoemaker.

At the farther end of the village are the woolen mills of Phil & Kuhn, who employ about six hundred people. This mill is the mainstay of the villagers. When the demand for such goods is brisk, there is plenty of work,

and general prosperity and hilarity. When the demand is light and the mills run on only half time, it is hard to make both ends meet.

To the pastorate of one of the village churches my friend John Jessig was called some years since. He had a larger opportunity, but chose that one. A young man, well equipped for the Master's service, filled with that divine earnestness which love of humanity always inspires but which greed of fame never gives, he welcomed the invitation to a narrow field of labor. "I want to learn how the great heart of man beats," he said; "and they can tell me the secret in Woodbine as well as elsewhere. I must get into touch with the laboring class, which, after all, is the thinking class in this country; and if I preach by the side of a mill wheel I shall find out what real men and women need."

The Reverend Robert Flood, his predecessor, gave him the only thing he had to give — advice. The kindly old gentleman had been retired on account of advancing age, after forty

years of patient and spiritually prosperous toil. It is a young man's world though, and when one has watched the frosts of sixty winters he must step aside with such grace as he can summon. So the parish made Robert Flood pastor emeritus, without a salary, or rather with such slender and uncertain income as an occasional donation party affords. When crippled by long service there is hardly a green spot on the earth for a white-haired minister, unless he finds it in the cemetery. He is admired until he says "Amen" in his farewell sermon, and after that comes neglect. If he can go to heaven at once, all is well; if he insists on living, his last days are full of sorrow and pain.

"It sometimes happens," said Mr. Flood to John, "that a minister's brain runs fallow as the ground does. When the farmer raises the same crop year after year, he must needs give his fields a rest, or stimulate them with a fertilizer. You will preach yourself out unless you read new books — and your salary will limit you in

that direction — or study the wants of the people by personal contact with their temptations and struggles. If you are ever at a loss for a Sunday topic, the shoemaker will give you one. He thinks with one lobe of his brain while he makes shoes with the other. He has been my tonic for a long while, and will serve you a good turn when you are in straits."

I hardly know how to describe Hiram Golf. He was in many respects a remarkable man, one worth looking at a second time. He was a philosopher without knowing it. To think his way down into the depths of a problem was his pleasure, and though his thoughts did not run in the usual channels, they were always suggestive. He was about fifty-eight years of age, had gray hair, deep-set blue eyes, a complexion that had never been tarnished by vicious habits, and a voice so rich and mellow that it seemed like a strain of music.

On the library shelf in his little shop was a worn "Paradise Lost," a treatise on astronomy,

several reports of labor organizations, a worm-eaten copy of "Pilgrim's Progress," and a Bible which had been read so much that it could hardly hold itself together.

The Bible is to many people an ornament for the center table. Used in this way, it ought to be expensively bound and kept free from the marring stains of daily use. To others, it is a religious luxury, a very important book to have within reach in case of emergency, because it vouches for the spiritual respectability and the orthodoxy of the owner. To still others, and Hiram is to be included in this list, it is one of the necessaries of life, a joy, a comfort, a consolation. Among such people the book is seldom found in good condition, from the binder's point of view. It is dog-eared, thumb-marked, and many of its verses are so dimmed by constant use that they are read with difficulty. A family with a dog-eared Bible make earnest church-members. God's blessing rests on the book when it is thumb-marked; and if its sacred

passages are blotted with tears, all the richer the blessing. Bibles with the gilding perfect are an accusation. They represent the secrets of God under lock and key, where no eye can see them and no heart get at them.

Hiram was an optimist in spite of the rheumatism. The twinges of that unpopular malady forced him to make a grimace now and then, but he was wont to say when the pain subsided — and he always said it in such cheerful tones that you were reminded of the sun peering through the clouds on an April day — "There will be no east wind up there! This old body is a sort of tumbledown concern, but I shall move into a new one by and by. To be young again, without no ache or pain! That's worth looking forward to, don't ye think?" and he turned his eyes to the window as though hoping to get a glimpse of the glistening minarets of the Beautiful City beyond the hills.

When John Jessig made his first excursion through the parish he knocked at the shoe-

maker's door. He had heard such kindly things of him from the neighbors that he was curious to make his acquaintance.

"Come in!" cried Hiram.

"I beg your pardon, and hope I am not intruding."

"Wall," said Hiram, as he caught sight of John's genial face, "you're welcome. Nobody never intrudes here. Take a cheer, parson, take a cheer. I'm right glad to see ye. Here, Marthy, bring in that rocking-cheer from the parlor. Nothin's too good for the minister, if he's the right sort, and you look as though you might be one of that kind, parson.

"Marthy, this is the new minister. Parson, this is my wife. You'll want to know her, for she's worth knowin'. Now then, if you'll excuse me, I'll keep right on with my work, fur I'm ruther pressed to-day. You won't mind that, will you?"

"On the contrary," replied John, fitting himself into his surroundings with admirable tact.

"That's what I thought," responded Hiram, as he drove a peg home, "or I wouldn't have said it. So you've come to Woodbine to cast your lot in with us folks."

"It looks like a promising field, Mr. Golf."

"Yes, for a right smart worker it is. Pretty rocky ground, some of it, but all the more credit if you manage to get a crop. It's up by daylight and in bed by candle-light in Woodbine, but I guess it's about as nigh to heaven from the Cheroquee Valley as from any other p'int, if ye reckon straight."

"I'm glad to be with the laboring class," said John, hoping thereby to draw out the shoemaker.

"Hm! I hain't no respect for any class that ain't a laborin' class," was the reply. "The Lord said, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' I rather imagine that if God kin work we needn't be ashamed to follow the example. They say that every man thinks of God from his own standp'int, so I naterally picter Him as always busy. The world don't accept that idee,

but it's a great comfort to me. The man who don't do nothin' ain't wuth nothin'. The kings of the earth have got us on the wrong road. To do nothin' is what they think makes 'em different from the common run of folks. And so it does; it makes 'em worse. Then they collect 'round 'em a multitude of other men and women who take pride in doin' nothin', and we've managed to get things so askew that we call them the nobility. It's noble to be lazy, is the gospel of this world. Ain't that queer, parson?"

John nodded, unwilling to enter on a controversy.

"It seems to me," continued Hiram, "that common sense is standin' on its head instead of its feet. The only noble man that I know anythin' about is the honest laborin' man. Work is the law of natur, and the secret of human happiness. Why, we've got to such a pass, even in this country, that everybody is workin' hard in the hope of gettin' so much money laid

up that they needn't do nothin' by and by. But somehow, before that time comes most of 'em die. That's what I call a Providence, for it saves 'em from an awful disapp'intment. They wouldn't have half as much pleasure in spendin' their fortune as they got out of makin' it."

"I'm afraid you will not find many people to agree with you, Mr. Golf."

"That don't make no difference. The truth is the truth, whether it is believed or not. It don't hurt the truth not to be believed, but it hurts you and me if we don't believe it. If there was less money in the world and more stiddy work, we should be better off. An idle class don't push, and they don't shove. They jest stand by and let other people do the pushin' and the shovin', and then they want their share of the benefit.

"Two things ought to be done right away. There's a whole lot of people up above us who live in sinful pleasure because they've got so much money. If you could reach up" — Hi-

ram suited the action to the word, stretching his hands toward the ceiling — "if you could catch them by the trouser-legs and pull 'em down to where they'd have to earn their livin' you'd certain save their bodies by makin' 'em healthy, and at the same time you might save their souls by givin' 'em somethin' to think of besides themselves.

"Then there's another whole lot of people, who have dropped 'most out of sight because they've had hard luck. They are willin' to take a job, but can't find one. Down they go, farther and farther, and take to vicious ways because nobody helps 'em. If we could stoop over and grab 'em by the coat collar, and lift 'em up to regular employment, we'd wake up their ambition and make men of 'em. There's reforms enough, parson, right in sight; and if you're willin' to sacrifice your pulpit dignity and roll up your sleeves you'll be busy most of the time. The world is worth savin'. Leastwise, the Lord thought so."

John's eyes glistened. Here was the man he had longed to see — an unconventional creature, with no respect for persons, but a boundless love for his kind. He felt, while Hiram was talking, as though some one had lighted the kindling-wood in his heart of hearts and the genial warmth were stealing to every fiber of his being. But he chose to keep still and let the shoemaker do the talking.

"Now see what the Bible says. It begins with the work of creation and ends with the work of salvation. Does any one take his ease in the Bible? If he does, he don't enjoy himself. God worked durin' six days, and made the world, and it is intimated that He even got tired, for He 'rested on the seventh day.'

"And when Christ came, He wasn't born in no palace, but in a stable. He worked in Nazareth at a carpenter's bench, and when He left that for His ministry He traveled on foot for weary miles, and must have been worn out when night fell. O parson, God's world is a

work-a-day world, and there ain't no honor in idleness. Idleness is nothin' but a serpent's egg, and only a serpent can come out of it."

During this same conversation John said, "Now, Mr. Golf —"

"Call me Hiram, if you please, parson. That's what they all call me, and I'd scarcely know myself by any other name. But what was you sayin'?"

"Simply this," answered John, "that I am glad to see a man who can use the humblest vocation for the glory of God, as you are doing."

Hiram laid his shoe down, and proceeded to take off his leather apron. Then he crossed his legs, clenched his hands around one knee, and looked at John full in the face. Evidently the minister had touched him on a tender spot. He was in no degree excited, but was possessed of the earnestness which sometimes makes us fanatical.

"There ain't no sech thing in this universe, parson," he responded with grave dignity,

"there ain't no sech thing in this wide world as a humble vocation. You are on the wrong track, even if you are our preacher, and what you say isn't orthodox."

"Excuse me," quickly replied John, "if I have wounded you by my hasty expression; but what I meant to say was —"

"No, no, parson, don't run away with the idee that you've got to talk so's not to wound me or any one else. 'Tain't that at all. What I want is for you to guard against woundin' the Lord. That's a more important matter."

"Yes?" said John, considerably embarrassed.

"Now, you are a minister of the Gospel by the grace of God. Ain't that so?"

"I hope it is true, Hiram."

"You don't hope, parson, you know, or you'll have to begin all over again. Well, I am a shoemaker by the grace of God. If I make good shoes I shall get just as much credit in the hereafter as you will for bein' a faithful pastor.

All work is noble and honorable, and it'll take a good deal of argyment to show me that all work isn't about equally important. You'll carry up to the Jedgment-seat a fair sample of the sermons you have preached, and I'll carry up a fair sample of the shoes I've been makin'. Your sermons will settle your future, and my shoes will settle mine. We shall fall or rise accordin' as the sample represents good or bad work. You don't s'pose, do you, that the Lord's a-goin' to look at your sermon and say, 'John Jessig, take your seat 'way up there in front,' then look at my shoes and say, 'Hiram, you're mighty lucky to get in here at all; go and take a seat 'way down at the end there'? Oh no, parson. That's the difference between the Lord and us folks. If your sermon is good, and my shoes is good, He'll say, 'John and Hiram, you've used your talent about equally well. Go up there and sit in the front bench side by side, and jine in the general Hallelujah.'"

"Then you don't think there'll be any dis-

crimination as to the class of work done?" suggested John.

"Only the discrimination between good work and bad work, not between brain work and hand work. I don't believe there'll be no aristocracy in heaven; not a bit of it. All the wings will be made after the same pattern. Goodness is goodness, parson, whether you find it in the mill-owner or a spindle-tender. The Spirit of the Lord is jest as much with me as I sit here peggin' away on Widow Brown's number fives, that are split at the sides, as it is with you when you are tryin' to write somethin' that'll convert sinners and cheer the godly next Sunday mornin'. Everythin' depends on the way we do our work; and as for that, it's jest as necessary for the people to have good shoes as good preachers. They can't get along without either. Men may look down on a house-painter, or a carpenter, but I reckon the angels don't do that sort of thing."

"That is all very interesting, Hiram, possibly

a little startling and novel, but quite worthy of consideration."

"Jest look at that, parson," and Hiram took from a pile on the floor the battered shoe of a child; "that belongs to William Runkle's youngest, a little feller of six, and not over hardy. That boy's body ought to be kept healthy, oughtn't it? Wall, I'm goin' to do my part. If he should catch cold some muddy day, and get the pneumonia, his father, who only earns twelve dollars a week, would have a heavy doctor's bill to pay, and even then he might lose the child. That would almost break his heart, I do believe. Now then, I propose to mend them shoes as though my salvation depended on it. I can't afford, as a child of God with a hope of heaven, to put poor work into that job. Too much depends on it. Yes, parson," and Hiram looked at the shoe with something like tenderness, "too much depends on it. I wouldn't like to meet that boy up yonder and have him tell me he died because I

wasn't a faithful shoemaker. I couldn't stand that nohow. Do you think a vocation is a humble one when it deals with the health and lives of our fellow-creatures? I reckon not."

John Jessig regarded Hiram with mingled surprise and admiration. He was discovering some secrets, was getting a view of real life, was looking at it from the standpoint of a workingman.

On his way home he had a good deal to think about. "All honest work is important," he said to himself. "All work is important, and all work should be honest. Every man should be consecrated to his business, no matter what it is. The carpenter should ply his plane with his heart as well as with his hands. The blacksmith should drive nails into the horse's hoofs with his prayers as well as with his hammer, and do it not for pay only, but for God. We are all, every one of us, priests of the Temple. Some wear robes, and some are in shirt-sleeves; some work with pen and ink, and others with forges and scythes and

tailor's needles; but we are all priests, just the same. Toil is honorable in itself, and ennobling in its influence."

There was material for a sermon, one that would touch the inner springs and motives of the spiritual life, would impress upon men a larger sense of personal importance in the world, lift them above the mere drudgery of their tasks, and fill them with inspiring and cheering impulses.

John Jessig had caught hold of a clue, and he determined to follow it to the end.

II.

THE SPOKES AND THE HUB OF THE WHEEL.

Late one afternoon, Hiram, John Jessig, and Deacon Jonathan Tubbs were sitting together on the stoop of the shoemaker's house. The sun was just dropping behind the hills beyond the river, and the great banks of clouds above their well wooded summits seemed all aflame. The vanguard of approaching darkness wandered lazily over the landscape, as though some one with a whole armful of shadows had thrown down a single handful, which the gentle wind was scattering in every nook and corner. The cows were lowing in the distant fields as though their owners had neglected to call them to the barn, and the hens were sauntering up and down waiting for the roosting hour. Nature was in

her balmiest mood, and the dark blue sky seemed like a beckoning hand.

Hiram had finished his day's work, had enjoyed his supper, and was glad to see his friends. His crutch — for one of his legs was badly twisted — lay by his side. The weather was warm, and he sat in his shirt-sleeves.

"Well, parson," he began, "what you been doin' to-day? Is your sermon ready for Sunday, and what is it about?"

Deacon Tubbs hitched uneasily, for he had a profound reverence for the cloth, and was almost offended at Hiram's familiarity.

"Thank you for asking the questions," answered John. "There is a large variety of topics on the carpet just now, but I received by mail yesterday a very encouraging report of the progress made by our denomination, and I thought of talking about that."

"A little praisin' of ourselves, eh, parson?" and Hiram looked at John quizzically.

"No, I think not, Hiram, but we have made

such great advances of late that it seemed worth a mention."

"So it is parson, so it is. When the kingdom spreads, tell the people all about it."

"It's encouragin' to know that we're keepin' up our eend, and perhaps a leetle more," suggested the deacon. "'Twon't do to let other folks get ahead of us. It makes us proud of our church, and tells mightily on the contribution-box."

"That is well enough as fur as it goes," remarked Hiram, "but in my jedgment it don't go fur enough. We ain't to forgit that the purpose of all good men and women is to make Christians, and not to make this or that kind of Christians."

"I don't agree," broke in the deacon, "not by a good deal. We are to — "

"Stop a minute, Jon'than, and let me say my say out. Addin' members to our church, well, it's one thing, and it ain't no more; addin' mem-

bers to Christ is a much bigger thing. And I'll tell you why I think so. It's jest this way: when we get to heaven we shan't belong to the 'Piscopal or the Methodis' church, we shall simply belong to Christ's church. So we shouldn't waste no time in specially makin' 'Piscopals or Methodis'. We jine a denomination accordin' to temperament, or early education, or possibly prejudice, but it is nothin' more than a matter of convenience. What we are after is not the denomination, but the Christ who is in it. If you shake the denomination off of a man and leave the Christ, he don't lose much; but if you shake off the Christ and leave the denomination, you take about all he has."

The deacon shook his head ominously, but Hiram refused to be interrupted. "Now, 'way down in the bottom of my heart, I belong to every denomination on the footstool, because I find somethin' in each one of 'em that helps me. I never went into a church in my life where I

couldn't sing 'Glory to God!' with the rest of 'em. They're all alike to me, parson, if the Central Figure is there."

Just then Tom Mag went by rolling a carriage wheel.

"Accident?" sang out the deacon.

"Yes, a little one," was the reply; "but no harm done. Farmer Bright had too big a load on the hind seat, and three girls and a boy was spilled in the dirt, that's all."

"Hm!" said Hiram eagerly, "that's jest what I want for what I'm sayin'. See that wheel, parson?"

The minister nodded.

"There ain't none of us blind," sneered the deacon, who did not enjoy the shoemaker's radicalism.

"Wall, supposin' that heaven was sitooated on the hub of that wheel, and all the people of the earth was livin' in different spots on the tire. Them people want to get to heaven, that is, to the hub; and after doin' a deal of explorin' they

find the spokes which seem to lead in that direction. 'Hullo!' they say, 'there 'pears to be a good many ways provided.' If good Deacon Tubbs had been there, he would have argyed that there could only be one way, and that all the other spokes was a delusion and a snare. But that wouldn't be sound reasonin', parson. The Lord couldn't be as mean and narrer as we are if He tried. So there is lots of spokes, and they are all provided by Him.

"Now then, jest watch the people. Some of 'em trudge along one spoke, maybe a yaller one, and some trudge along another spoke, maybe a red one. The farther away they are from heaven — that is, the hub — the farther apart they are from each other; and the nearer they get to heaven — that is, the hub — the nearer they are to each other. Ain't that so, deacon?"

"Accordin' to the wheel that's so," replied Tubbs frankly.

"All right. The p'int I want to make is this: away from God, away from each other; nigh to

God, nigh to each other. That's Scripter, and it's sense.

"When people is away off from the hub, each one declares that his partic'lar spoke is the only one that leads there, and so the quarrelin' begins, and the Christianity steps out. This man won't speak to that man because, as he says, he's travelin' along the wrong spoke, and won't never arrive to the hub. But by and by, when they all get to heaven, they find to their surprise that one spoke was jest as good as the other, no matter whether it was red or yaller."

"I'm not quite sure of all that, Hiram," suggested the minister, at which the deacon pricked up his ears and became an attentive listener. "Where there are many ways, it is safe to declare, and dangerous not to, that some are better than others; and that there must be one way which is better than all the rest. I don't see how you can avoid that conclusion."

"Hold up, parson," said Hiram, as he pounded the floor with his crutch in his eagerness, "don't

be in too much of a hurry. Let's stick to that wheel. If you measure 'em with your foot-rule, you find that one spoke ain't no shorter road to the hub than any other. They are all alike, except in color, and the color is nothin' more than a matter of taste. What everybody's got to do, in order to get to the hub, is to keep on his individooal spoke; and if he's got the right spirit he'll invite them as hasn't no spoke at all to make use of hisn. But as for sayin' that your spoke is any better than the next one, you can't honestly do it.

"I wouldn't lift my hand to help a man from his spoke to mine unless he wasn't happy where he happened to be, and didn't like the color of the spoke he was travelin' on; but I'd go considerable out of my way to lift a poor fellow who is wanderin' round between the spokes, and has lost himself, to get on my spoke. After that, if I found he liked some one else's spoke better'n mine, I'd do all I could to get him where he'd make the most progress.

"There ain't no religion in quarrelin' about spokes, but if you want to discuss plans for h'istin' everybody on some one of the spokes and givin' him a fair chance to get to the hub at last, why, that's a very different sort of thing."

"Then you'd have me praise all denominations equally, would you, Hiram?" said John. "That would hardly be reasonable. Didn't I join this one because I believe it to have advantages over others, and if I think so oughtn't I to say so? It seems to me I should be loyal to the body of which I am a part."

"Yes, parson, you jined it because it had advantages over others for you yourself. That's why I jined it too. But you don't mean that because you jined it therefore everybody else ought to jine it, do you?"

"Certainly he does," broke in the deacon; "that's jest what he means."

"Then he'd be more shaller than I think he is," replied Hiram good-naturedly. "The fust

thing is to be ambitious for souls. It's not only the fust thing, but the only thing. If your denomination thrives because of that, well and good. I hain't nothin' to say agin it. But what you're after is souls, and the denomination'll foller at its own gait. There ain't no use of talkin', parson, men is made on different plans, and they can't all think alike or feel alike. There are the Methodis' up at tother end of the village. Jest see what they're doin'! Now, we can't all be Methodis', for we ain't built that way; but would it do you, or me, or would it do the Lord any harm if you was to call them Methodis' your brethren, and lend 'em a helpin' hand when they get up a fair to pay off their debt?"

"What!" cried the deacon in alarm, "take money out of our pockets to arm our rivals with weapons against ourselves? What are you thinkin' of, Hiram?"

"I'm tryin' to think of God," said Hiram quietly, "and not too much of our partic'lar way of doin' things."

"Go on, Hiram," said John. "You were about to say something else."

"Wall, at the other end of the village is the 'Piscopalians and the Presbyterians. Now I couldn't be neither one nor tother, and yet I sometimes think I'm both. Ain't they mowin' down evil with a sharp scythe, and ain't they cuttin' a pretty wide swarth? Would you stop 'em? I make a mistake in you, parson, if you would."

"Then you don't believe in no true church, don't you?" asked the deacon.

"Yes I do, yes I do," was the earnest response. "I believe if you should roll all the churches up in one bunch, that would be the true church. This one is true for me, and that one is true for the next man, and I don't see how you can get out of it. What's wanted is somethin' for everybody, and if everybody is to have somethin' then that somethin' ought to have different tastes to suit varyin' dispositions and temperaments."

"You seem to be willing to take the whole

world to your embrace on equal terms, Hiram," suggested the minister. "I don't think I can quite go with you to that extent."

"Nor me neither," said the deacon. "'Tain't natur."

"You would dissipate all pride of denomination," continued John, "which you must admit is a very important matter, and thereby lessen the enthusiasm of the whole body of clergy."

"Lessen their enthusiasm, parson?" replied Hiram with some ardor. "Nothin' of the sort, accordin' to my way of thinkin'. If you was in the stern of a life-boat, tryin' to save some wrecked sailors, it ought not to lessen your enthusiasm because the man at the bow was haulin' the drippin' fellers in at his end, and doin' as good work as you was doin' at your end. Not a bit of it, parson. On the other hand, if you work in the right spirit, your enthusiasm is increased by the successful work of other people. Now, if your object in goin' in that life-boat had a element of pure selfishness in it, and you wanted

to show what a big and strong man you was, you'd be awfully discouraged if some one else was bigger and stronger than you, and got more half-drowned folks into the boat than you did. But if you had the proper motive, and your only purpose was to have the lost saved, no matter who saved 'em, you'd thank God that some one was workin' alongside of you, and then strain a muscle to see if you couldn't get hold of an extra soul or two."

"You don't think it well, I take it, to have the world divided into religious sects, then, Hiram. In that case, why do you belong to one particular sect? You are apparently inconsistent there."

"I guess not, parson. I believe in sects with all my heart, but I can't believe in fences between 'em. With a powerful devil to fight, I don't see no sense in wastin' our gunpowder on each other. Instead of sayin' to each other, 'I'm right, and you're wrong,' I would have 'em say, 'We are both right, and the devil is wrong,' and

then jine forces to whip the enemy. I would leave all the sects jest as they be, but I would make 'em neighborly.

"Now, when we had the great war that we've just come out of, we got together a tremenjous army, and they h'isted the flag and nailed it to the masthead. The gov'ment didn't say that every regiment should wear the same uniform, though they was all fightin' for the same cause. Oh no, parson. Mr. Lincoln allowed Illinois to get up a regiment of artillery, and Massachusetts to get up a regiment of cavalry, and New York to send a regiment of Zouaves, with red shirts and blue trowsers. If a man wanted to jine the artillery, all right. He was welcome to do it. If he jined the cavalry, all right; nobody said nothin'. If he wanted to be a Zouave, all right. What difference did it make, so long as he went into the field? People followed their own tastes in such matters, because it wasn't no matter where they was, provided they was in fightin' trim.

"Jest look at the picter. There was the enemy, and a hard enemy they was to beat. We found that out, didn't we? Who cared whether this soldier had on a red coat, if he handled his gun proper? Courage don't depend on clothing, but on the heart, and what we wanted was courage. 'God bless every one of 'em,' we said, 'and they can have pea-green uniforms if they want to.' Why, if you and I had dared to criticise 'em in them partic'lars, we should have been hooted out of town, and, parson, we'd 'a' deserved to be."

"Oh yes, that's all straight, Hiram," began the deacon; "but don't you see — "

"Jest wait a minute, deacon," broke in the shoemaker; "I'm comin' to that p'int directly. Now, in them times there was some folks up north who didn't want to wear no uniform at all, and objected to jinin' any regiment. They was after fightin' on their own individooal hook. In that case we shouldn't 'a' knowed whether they was on our side or tother, and they might

get shot by their own friends. What did we say? We told 'em that the federal army, with the flag of the Union floatin' above it, was a organized body of men, and that organization was necessary to effective work. If you take a handful of loose sand and throw it at the winder-pane, it don't break nothin'; but if your handful of sand is made solid like the atoms of a stone, and then you throw it, you break the winder-pane to smash. That's the way we argyed. We didn't ask people to enlist in this regiment, or in that one, but we asked 'em to choose any regiment, and then put on that regiment's uniform. Not that the uniform was better than the others, but it was theirs. If we had fought as individooals, without bein' properly commanded, we should have lost the day, for certain; but we fought in companies, in battalions, in army corps, and so won the battle."

"Now let's hear what all this is driftin' toward," said the deacon.

"Well, it's jest this wise. I would say the

same thing about religion. The rule holds good in both cases, and no mistake. I wouldn't tell a man he must jine this or that or the other church. There is churches enough to suit everybody's peculiarities, and he should be free to do as he pleases about that. I would say, 'Jine some church, any church, and I shall be satisfied. Don't fight the evil in the world on your own hook, as a free lance, because you will throw your best efforts away and waste a lot of vallible energy. Jine anywhere, only jine, and add your individooal strength to the strength of others. If you do that, you never'll be sorry. What do you say, parson?"

"Well, I can only partially agree with you, Hiram. I don't think you emphasize denominationalism enough. It is worth more than you think it is. Still, I am interested in your views; go on, and pray tell us how you have reached these rather unusual and odd conclusions."

Hiram was silent for a minute or two, apparently lost in meditation. He looked up at the

sky and the scudding clouds, but did not find there what he wanted. Then he looked through the open window, into his little shop, glanced hastily at the workbench on which he had sat for many a year, at the hammer lying on the floor, at the lapstone, and at a pile of shoes, large and small, in various stages of dilapidation. They did not, however, furnish him with the illustration he sought. At last his eyes fell on the river, only a hundred yards away, and at once his face brightened.

"Parson," he began, "have you ever rowed on the Cheroquee?"

"But once or twice, on a summer evening, Hiram."

"You have, deacon?"

"Yes, as many times as there are straws in a haystack."

"Then you've noticed, deacon, that for half a dozen miles, either way from here, it flows through different kinds of soil."

"I hev; you're right there, Hiram."

"Away up yonder, parson, to the nor'ard, and just this side of Clovertop, there's a soft bank of clay, and as the water rushes by the bend it breaks into this clay and becomes muddy. You've noticed that, deacon?"

"For sartin, Hiram."

"Two miles lower down there is an area of red sand, and the river takes up a quantity of that, too."

"Right up there by the big perch holes, you mean, Hiram, opposite Widow Green's farm?"

"Precisely, deacon. Then down yonder, to the south'ard, the soil is black loam, and it mixes easily with the current.

"Now then, s'pose I fill three bottles at these three different p'ints, and then place them on a shelf, what happens? In the course of a few hours each bottle has a quantity of pure, clear water on top, and a lot of sediment on the bottom. That's nateral. In one bottle, the sediment is clay; in the next, it is red sand; in the third, it is dark-brown or black loam.

"Well, the River of Life is like the Cheroquee. It runs through various countries, and temperaments, and times, and perhaps prejudices. This River of Life, when it starts from the Throne of God, is absolutely clear water, but somehow it gets colored by the different denominations through which it flows. I don't see how that can be helped, and I'm not certain that it ought to be helped.

"Your Methodism gives it one color, your Catholicism gives it another color, and your Presbyterianism and 'Piscopalianism gives it still another color. Mind you, parson, no matter how it is colcred, it's always the River of Life. Don't forget that. Yes, it's always the River of Life, wherever it flows, no matter how muddied up it may be.

"If you fill your bottle at the p'int where it flows through these different sects of Christians, the fust thing you notice is that the water ain't exactly clear. Let the bottles stand for a while, and then you find that the water has purified

itself, and the foreign substances that don't properly belong to it has all settled to the bottom. That water is the same in all your bottles, and it's the genooine article. These sediments, black, brown, red, or any other color, represent the 'isms' of the church — Presbyterian-ism, Episcopal-ism, Catholic-ism, Method-ism, and so on.

"The sediment isn't worth much if you happen to be thirsty, though that's what men have been quarrelin' about. The water, though, will quench your thirst, and it ain't no matter which bottle you drink out of.

"In this life it seems to be necessary to have a certain amount of sediment in our religion, but in the hereafter that will all be filtered out. That's why I love every man who loves Christ, and that's why I never ask what sediment he believes in, but whether he's drinkin' from the River of Life."

III.

"FEARIN' AND TREMBLIN'."

JOHN JESSIG opened his house every Wednesday evening for general conversation on religious subjects. These meetings were well attended, partly because there was a good deal of enthusiasm in the parish, partly because they were more informal than a gathering in any church could be, and partly because at eight o'clock an urn of tea and another of coffee were brought into the room and a half-hour of sociability followed.

Tea and coffee as auxiliaries to religion have been greatly underestimated. The aroma of these genial beverages dissipates the frigid stateliness of such occasions, and exerts a very neighborly if not a distinctly evangelical influence. Two men who are reasonably well acquainted

will sit stiffly side by side for a full hour, as though they were a couple of icicles, or as though they were participants in a family feud, not knowing how to begin a conversation, or perhaps with no desire to begin one. The cunning magic of a cup of coffee changes their thoughts and feelings in an instant, loosens their tongues by some unaccountable legerdemain, and starts them on a dozen topics in a dozen minutes.

Every clergyman knows that the simplest kind of refreshments works wonders. Invisible barriers tumble to invisible ground, and the chill air gives way to something almost tropical. Whether it is that the spiritual life is distantly or indirectly related to the digestive organs, I have never been able to discover. I merely relate facts, and leave the philosophy which underlies them to abler and more curious minds.

Young people especially are always in a state of chronic hunger. They attend a meeting in the vestry, which has no kitchen attached, in the spiritual condition indicated by wraps and

furs; but the sociability engendered in a meeting which offers even the humble sandwich is as tempting as a flower garden. The ice of formality melts, and religion joins hands with general good feeling when the coffee-pot hums its little song.

John Jessig had learned this secret from the aged ex-pastor, who in turn had learned it by repeated experiment. From seven o'clock to eight on this particular evening he had suggested a variety of topics — the church debt, the feasibility of holding a fair to pay off the mortgage, and the best means of reaching the unchurched of Woodbine; but no one ventured to break silence except Deacon Northwind, who droned in his usual way and got all his verbs tangled in the meshes of his adjectives, and one other individual, who spoke so low that he could hardly hear his own voice. It was an iceberg hour, and John felt the cold chills creeping over him.

But after the table had been cleared away it

seemed as though everybody wanted to talk at once. Sisters and brethren were alike so full of opinions that they could hardly contain themselves. Faces wore an entirely different expression, and tongues which had suffered from paralysis suddenly started into activity. The meeting from that moment was not merely lively, but effervescent, and John recognized gratefully the benign influence of the coffee berry and the tea plant.

That portion of the debate to which I wish to call your attention followed close on the heels of a remark by Farmer Kinch. Kinch was a thoroughly good man — now gone to his reward — but his heart seemed to work upside-down. Religion, to him, involved a frightful responsibility. There was a modicum of misery in his happiness. If there had not been, he could not have been happy at all. The ordinary pleasures of life seemed to him to be tinged with criminality, and whenever he saw a man thoroughly enjoying himself he shook his head mournfully.

It might not be fair to say that some people are so good that they are bad; but I venture the assertion that when a man thinks God made a mistake in creating flowers and painting the sky blue instead of black, and then runs his life by that theory, he depresses the spiritual vitality in his vicinity.

Farmer Kinch had only one string to his harp, but he played on that with vigor and persistency. It was what the neighbors called "the fear and tremblin' string."

Hiram listened very respectfully at first, but, after that, very impatiently. He shifted from one side of his chair to the other, and at last, unable to stand the pressure any longer, broke in on the monotonous speaker.

"Brother Kinch," he said, "I've been thinkin' about that for a good many years now. I reckon you and me agree about the fust part, that is, the workin'-out-our-salvation part, because salvation is a great and glorious thing, that can't be understood all to once. There's a mighty

deal to it, more than any one can get hold of in a day, or a year, or a lifetime. We keep workin' at it, unrollin' it, examinin' it, and the more we work the more we learn about it, and the more grateful we be. But as to the 'fear and tremblin',' I don't exactly catch your meanin'. How do you explain that?"

"Wall," said Farmer Kinch, not unwilling to measure swords with his adversary, and feeling very sure of his ground, "I take the Scripter just as it reads. It's plain enough, and I don't see no chance for a difference of opinion. When the Bible says spade I don't s'pose it means shovel."

"That's all right," rejoined Hiram. "But the parson will tell us, I guess, that before we make a theory out of Scripter it's dangerous not to examine it pretty thorough. If it says spade so plain that nobody can make anythin' else out of it, then I am willin' to take the spade and work out my salvation with it. I don't want no shovel if the Lord says spade, and I won't

handle nothin' else. But in my jedgment a good deal of injury has been done by not knowin' what God reely said. Ain't that so, parson?"

"On general principles," answered John Jessig, "Brother Golf is right; but I don't quite see the drift of the argument. Perhaps Brother Kinch will explain himself a little further."

"Accordin' to my mind," responded the farmer, "no man can't be happy if he's got a 'fear and tremblin'' job on his hands."

Hiram bowed his head approvingly.

"Salvation," continued Kinch, "is jest that sort of thing, and you can't get away from it. We've got to be saved, and it ain't easy. Religion is dreadful serious, because gettin' to heaven has a good many uncertainties connected with it."

"But let us get right down to the main p'int," suggested Hiram. "What is it that a man has got to fear, and what is there that he must tremble about?"

"Why, he ought to fear that after all he won't get the salvation, of course. Isn't that what the Bible says? And how can he help tremblin' if he has sot his heart on it, and knows that at any minute it may slip away from him? No man ain't safe until he's on the other side of Jordan, and can't go the wrong way any more. Human natur is such that you can't feel sure of heaven until you get there. That's my doctrine, and that's what St. Paul tells us."

Hiram hung his head. His attitude showed that he was both grieved and puzzled. "Wall," he said, in very sorrowful tones, "if Brother Kinch is right, then I've traveled for forty year on the wrong road. I'll have to throw away all I've been gatherin' and begin over again. No man ain't safe from condemnation until he's dead! Is that what you said, brother?"

"That's jest it exactly," repeated Kinch, rather doggedly.

"Can that be so?" continued Hiram. "Isn't a man safe when he's got the promise of God

in his heart? If God can't keep that promise now, what reason have you to s'pose He can keep it hereafter? You see, all the underpinnin' is kinder knocked from my faith, and it's likely to tumble to pieces. I shouldn't like to have anythin' of that kind happen to me."

"Perhaps," suggested John, "you agree with Brother Kinch on the main point, and disagree only about the proper definition of terms."

"No, I'm afraid it's a good deal deeper than that," said Hiram, shaking his head, "a good deal deeper. But let me put it in this way: If I buy a horse of you, Farmer Kinch, and give you my note for it, due in ninety days, you will naterally have some anxiety about your money. You keep your eyes on my business. I may be willin' enough to pay, but perhaps I can't. It ain't my willin'ness or unwillin'ness that bothers you, but my ability. If people tell you that I have plenty of shoes to mend, so many that I have to work by candle-light, then you feel reasonably sure of gettin' your money when the

time comes. But if you come round to my cottage and see that work is slack, that I've thrown my lapstone on the floor and am readin' a newspaper or a book, then you look for'ard to the collection of that debt with fear and tremblin'. The payment of that money depends on contingencies which I can't control, and I shouldn't blame you if you was to shake your head and say, 'I don't quite see how Hiram Golf is goin' to meet that obligation.' Ain't that so?"

"Yes, it looks that way," and Kinch nodded his head. "That's precisely where the fear and tremblin' comes in."

"All right, and I hain't nothin' to say agin it, neighbor Kinch. But in the matter of salvation there ain't no Hiram Golf to deal with, but the Lord God Himself. There ain't no contingencies with Him. No unforeseen accident ever happens in the region of the Throne. When He promises to do anythin', He's goin' to keep the promise, and if after He has give you the pledge

and you have accepted it, if after that you go round with the feelin' that He can't meet His obligations, why, you don't understand who you're dealin' with, that's all. When God tells me that He'll do somethin' for me by and by, it's jest as good as done, and I'm certain of it as though I had it right here in my hand."

"You can't be sure of nothin' till you get it," persisted Kinch. "It's a pretty loose sort of religion, to my mind, that makes a man say he's sure of goin' to heaven."

"And in my jedgment," responded Hiram, "it's a pretty loose sort of religion which allows a man to feel any doubt about it after he has accepted Christ for his Saviour."

"Accordin' to you, Hiram," said Kinch, "when you once get converted you ought to believe the matter all closed up and settled. That don't strike me as sense."

"It's not only sense, but revelation," cried Hiram, whose eyes began to flash. "When I

have a distinct promise of God, I should consider myself worse than an infidel to stay awake a minute thinkin' about it. There it is, and that's the end of it. I've got it; it's mine. Neither principalities nor powers can rob me of it. Thieves can't steal it, and if the house catches fire and everythin' else is burned up, I've got that promise."

"You are in a dangerous state of mind," said the farmer. "I wouldn't swap my belief for yours for the whole world to boot!"

"On the contrary, I'm in a very happy and contented frame of mind, for, surrounded as we all be with uncertainties, there are some things I'm perfectly sure of. I go round singin' all day. I shout 'Glory Hallelujah!' as I peg away at them shoes. I feel as though I had suddenly fallen heir to a big estate. I can't help tellin' about my good fortune to every one who comes into my little shop, and I can't help sayin' that there's plenty more left, and he can have all he wants and be as happy as I am. I wish all the

world had it, I wish everybody here in Woodbine had it, I wish you had it yourself, Brother Kinch, for then we'd send up a great chorus of praise every mornin'."

"Hm! Yes," broke in Cynthia. "But, Hiram, you seem to know a good deal more about these things than St. Paul did. When a man knows as much as that, I feel a little skittish about follerin' him. It's a safe rule not to holler till you're out of the woods, and you don't get out of the woods into the clearin' till you die."

Hiram gave a glance at John Jessig. The little company was thoroughly roused, and the minister especially seemed to enjoy the situation immensely.

"Ain't I takin' up too much time?" asked Hiram, but John nodded, and the shoemaker went on:

"The question ain't whether I know more'n St. Paul did. I don't want you to think I'm settin' myself before the Scripters. I love the

Bible, and have read every word of it a great many times. No, the question ain't whether I know more'n the Apostle did, but whether I've caught his meanin'. It's very unfort'nate when we get a wrong meanin' out of the text, and build a doctrine on it."

"Then," said Kinch, "do you mean that after all you do fear and tremble about your salvation?"

"Yes, jest that. I spend every day in fear and tremblin', but —"

"Precisely," broke in Cynthia, with an air of argumentative triumph. "Then you and we agree."

"Not quite, I think," answered Hiram solemnly.

"What do you fear, Brother Hiram, and at what do you tremble?" asked John.

"Parson, I'm not afraid that God won't keep His promise, and I'm not afraid that He can't keep it, and I'm not afraid that I haven't got it all safe in my heart. I want to make that plain

as possible. But I do fear that I can't be grateful enough for what God has given me, and I do *tremble* because He is so wonderful generous that He is tryin' to pour a whole gallon of salvation into my poor little teacup of a soul. I'm afraid I can't hold it all. Just think of it! He will blot out all my sins, and accept Christ's sacrifice in my behalf! He will give me a new body when this one is worn out — and it's pretty nigh that nowadays. He will take me to a House where there won't be no more want, no more sorrer, and no more grief! He holds me up when I sink under the heavy burden, and by and by He will brush death aside, give me a share in the general resurrection, and allow me to live with Him forever and forever.

"I call Him 'my Father,' but the word don't begin to explain my feelin's. It's all beyond me; more, infinitely more, than I deserve. Can I help singin' at such a prospect? Shall I go about sighin' and groanin' under them circumstances? I tell you, parson, I can't do it, I

can't do it. The thing that frightens me, and it is the only thing, is that, do my best, I shall still be only a little chiny cup to hold a whole ocean of heaven."

At nine o'clock the meeting broke up.

IV.

FEW DUTIES, MANY PRIVILEGES.

IT was Blue Monday with John Jessig. In the vocabulary of the sensitive clergyman these are the two most appalling words. John had slept restlessly the night before, and in his troubled dreams a frightful hobgoblin had appeared, holding in his hands a sermon of Sunday morning, and laughing contemptuously as he shook it in the trembling parson's face. "Is that the best you can do?" asked the spirit derisively. "Were you educated through long years and at great expense to produce such a flimsy, sleepy apology of a sermon as that?"

Then the scene suddenly changed, and John saw a little knot of his parishioners at the church door indulging in criticisms under their breath, which were far more candid than agreeable.

Their words were as indistinct as the far-away echo of muttering thunder, but his heart sank as he came down the aisle.

When he rose from unrestful slumber, it was with the depressing conviction that he was never intended for the pulpit, that the genius of the preacher was wholly lacking, and that the sooner he gave up his profession and made room for a more acceptable pastor, the better for himself and for every one concerned.

I suppose all ministers have such dreams at times, and take a lonely tramp through the valley of humiliation on a Monday morning. It is the one day of the week to be dreaded — an ordeal for body and soul alike. If they can manage to pull through the heavy hours till the stars come out on Monday night, they can face the other days with cheerful resignation; but Monday is the period of intellectual and spiritual reaction, and its twelve hours are twelve taunting ghouls. The bow has been bent until everything is taut and ready to snap; the brain has

been in a whirl of excitement; the heart has been on fire, and the lassitude which follows is almost hopeless in character. The minister finds himself in a state of partial collapse, is haunted by the thought that he ought never to write another sermon, that he has made the fatal mistake of a lifetime, that he is like a fisherman whose net is full of great rents through which the fish escape, that he is bungling the work of the Lord, and is unworthy of the commission he has received.

Mary Jessig was a true helpmeet. She knew that John's suffering was the consequence of overwrought nerves, and that a brisk walk in the country air would set him right again. She had prepared an appetizing breakfast, and while the good man at the other side of the table was buttering a roll, and looking downcast and weary, cautiously and tactfully suggested that the sermon was a good deal better than he thought it. She had overheard Deacon Eastwind, who was by no means given to flattery — John must admit that — say to his neighbor that it was worth

tackling up his horse and driving ten miles to hear. Such a wife is a friend in need, and as John was hungry for some sort of commendation he looked relieved and faintly smiled.

Nobody knows or can know how much a word of good cheer is worth to the man who occupies the pulpit. He is always distrustful of himself, and seldom sees whether the Gospel shots he is firing hit the mark or not. Unless the people who stand near the target, or, better still, the people who are themselves the target, tell him that his marksmanship is good, how can he find it out? Nothing so wrenches a minister's emotions as to see the congregation, which has perhaps listened respectfully to his words, file silently out of church with the apparent intention of avoiding the preacher because they don't want to hurt his feelings by expressing their real opinions. Its effect on the clerical mind is like that of an extinguisher on a candle.

If the people would take some pains to recognize the work of their pastor, would linger long

enough to take him by the hand in friendly greeting, they would thereby insure more effective sermons; for, after all, the preacher must not only minister to his congregation, but be ministered to by them. Good preaching is always an act of reciprocity. It consists of giving the people the food which they have shown a desire for. "I like what you said," remarks some poor soul that is wandering in darkness, and at once the minister puts another loaf of the same kind into the oven. If the people's attitude, instead of being indifferent, is one of friendly interest, the pastor catches the magnetic influence, and is borne upward as on the wings of an eagle. He outdoes himself in teaching when they outdo themselves in listening.

I used to tell my own people when they chanced to praise my sermon, that *they* preached it, not I. No man can help being eloquent, in its best sense, when the people's hearts as well as their ears are open. If he loves them, and they love him, it is easy for all to love the Lord.

There is nothing so suggestive to the speaker as the upturned faces in the pews. Many and many a time I have left my notes and followed the mood of some man or woman, applying the text to what was evidently his or her condition of mind. In that way my own soul went out in sympathy to that other soul, and we two traveled in confidential company until the Doxology was announced. I say, therefore, without hesitation, that congregations are responsible for the majority of poor sermons with which they are afflicted. If the minister is apart from them he becomes dull and perfunctory; if they are a part of the minister, and give him the stimulus of a kind word, he becomes earnest, pointed, and pungent.

John Jessig wandered into Hiram's little shop on that Monday morning. The shoemaker had heard him preach the day before, and would doubtless have something to say.

"No, I can't talk with you now," said Hiram cheerfully, "but I'll get through with this job

in half an hour. You see, parson," and he held the shoe up for John to inspect, "that's a very bad rip, and the poor woman who wears that shoe can't afford to buy another pair jest yet. It's pretty close business with her to make two ends meet. I shall find some way to patch the thing up, but I've got to put my whole mind to it. Now look here, parson, I'll tell you what to do. Jest go over the way to Jane Jenks, and have a chat with her. She's a right up-and-down Christian, is that woman. She's got religion enough to do housework with, and look after her children. It takes a good deal to do that, parson," and he looked through the dingy window to the cottage of his neighbor. "You know what's happened, don't you?"

"No, Hiram, I do not. Is it anything serious?"

"Yes, I'm afeared so. Reuben got a bad tumble last Friday, and they say two of his ribs is broke. I reckon you don't know how awfully poor they are, but you ought to. Reuben has

had a run of bad luck lately, and his faith is mightily shaken by it. I guess he's a good deal like a drownin' man who can't see no help, and don't know whether it'll pay to hold on to the timber any longer. Jane was cryin' pretty bad when I saw her yesterday afternoon, but the basket of potatoes and the piece of pork cheered her up considerable. They hain't got any too much in the larder, and if we are reely children of one family, the sooner we stand by them folks the better. Now excuse me, parson, for this shoe is the tormentinest puzzle I've had in a long while. Come back in half an hour, for I've got somethin' partic'lar to say."

"About the sermon, Hiram?"

"Yes, about the sermon."

"You—you didn't quite agree with me then?"

"You're mistook for once, parson. It was a grand sermon, a noble and sustainin' sermon, and I want you to preach another like it, only

stronger. That's the right nail, but you've got to drive it home. There, don't keep me from my work."

John's heart was in his mouth. He came very near laughing as he crossed the road. His spirits rose, his eyes brightened, and when he knocked at the Jenks's cottage he was a boy again. "Perhaps I am some good, after all," he said to himself.

He was only a shoemaker who had talked to the minister? No, it was a human soul that cheerily greeted another soul, and that is a very different matter.

John did not want to be flattered, only encouraged. Flattery is counterfeit coin, and no true minister will tolerate it for an instant. Kindly words, however, go a great way, and the average clergyman gets altogether too few of them.

"Now then, parson," said Hiram when the minister reappeared, "I've finished that bit of

work, and am at your service. You were quite right in askin' if I wanted to talk about that sermon. I'm glad of the chance to do it."

John was gratified, and full of pleasant expectancy.

"Let me see," said Hiram, "you was tellin' about duties and privileges. I came near shoutin', parson, when you said that — how did you put it? — that our privileges as Christians is about ten times as many as our duties. Didn't you say that, or pretty nigh that?"

John nodded.

"Good. You pulled the right bell-rope that time. There's lots of people, parson, and good people too, who are everlastin'ly talkin' about duty, duty, duty. I'm tired of the subject. If you can once fill a man's heart with love, the duties disappear. He hain't got nothin' left but privileges."

"You must be careful not to overstate that matter, Hiram," suggested John. "There are duties, plenty of them."

"Name one, parson."

"Well, isn't it our duty to love our neighbor as ourself?"

"No, parson, it ain't; not by no means. I can't possibly love my neighbor as myself if I do it as a duty, because I don't love myself as a duty, do I? Duty and love is a badly matched double team, and don't pull well together in harness. They are like Peter Johnson's sorrel and chestnut. The chestnut wants to prance all the time, and the sorrel is sober and melancholy. They stand out aginst each other, and neither can know what he can do best, because the other interferes. The Christian ought to be in sech a frame of mind that he will love his neighbor jest as he loves his brother and sister, and for the same reason, only it's a spiritual instead of a blood relation.

"If I see a forlorn creeter who has wasted his life, do I pity him as a matter of duty? Oh no. I couldn't do anythin' else but pity him. It's the natur of a soul that's born again. I know

God pities him, and I can't help doin' the same. I'm sorry he's gone astray, and am sure he isn't havin' a good time. He's got hold of life at the wrong end. 'Tain't for me to say what drove him to the bad, but since he's there, my heart goes out to him. I'm right in the midst of a whole lot of privileges when I feel that way. I think to myself, 'How good God must be to care for that ragged and unwashed soul! What a blessed thing it is that He asks me to jine in with Him in the work, and do what I can to lift that man out of the mire! God and me in partnership for the redemption of mankind!' Why, sech a thought is a revelation! Seems as though I had been introduced to the angelic host, and they was sayin', 'Hiram, here's a bad job, but the man's worth savin', and perhaps if you help us we'll get him on solid ground.' Isn't that wonderful? I tell you, parson, it ain't no mere duty to do a day's work of that kind, with the Lord God on your right hand; it's one of the transfigurin' privileges of life."

"Let me remind you, Hiram, that I referred to that matter in my sermon. I said that to love God is not to be classed among our duties."

"Yes, and my heart warmed to you, parson. That song ought to be sung on the hill-tops. A man must be a wretched sort of creeter whose love for his own Father is an act of duty. 'Twasn't so with Christ, and it ought not to be so with us. When I gave Jack the errand-boy a slice of frosted cake the other day — it was Marthy's baking — you should have seen his face. He hadn't had no sech piece of cake for a month, perhaps. He just glowed with happiness. Was it from any poor, little, miserable sense of duty that he looked up at me and said, 'Thank you, Mr. Golf'? No more'n it was a sense of duty that made him enjoy eatin' it. He ate it because he liked it, and that 'thank-you' tumbled from his lips as naterally as the rain falls.

"Now then, I am indebted to God for all I have here, and for all I expect in the hereafter.

He must give me these things, or I shall never get 'em. No money can buy 'em, and if it could, I haven't got the money. So there I am. He sent His Son to teach me how to live and tell me how to die. He is with me when it's dark and the stars are all shut out, and then, havin' allowed me to be in His company for fifty year, tells me He wants me to live with Him forever. After that, and with them facts starin' me in the face, do you ask me to love and trust Him from a sense of duty? Am I worse than the errand-boy, that I can't say 'thank you' right out of my heart? Why, parson, it would be an insult to my soul to preach sech a doctrine to me. I brush duty aside, as havin' nothin' to do with the matter, and count it a mighty privilege to go through life with my poor tremblin' hand in His."

John looked at the shoemaker with an approving glance, and he went on:

"Now, there's my Marthy — she's layin' the table for dinner. That dear woman has cheered

and blessed my life. Jest see that face, parson! It's old and it's wrinkled; but she's always young and beautiful to me. Now then, parson, the man who has sech a wife as that — well, there ain't no use talkin', for words can't tell the story. She's gone uphill and downhill with me since I was twenty-three year old, and we've had to travel over some ruther rugged ground. Does any one say that my lovin' Marthy is a duty? Nonsense! I won't listen to it. Is it my duty — most intolerable word! — to sacrifice my comfort for her when she's sick, and spend whole nights watchin' at her side and prayin' that she will get well? Duty, parson? I can't help it. It's my greatest pleasure, and I couldn't drag myself away at such a time. It ain't no hardship to go hungry or to get tired for her sake, if I can only see the light returnin' to them eyes, and the smile comin' back after days of sufferin'.

"To my mind, religion is jest like the sunshine that ripens the corn. A man can find all

he wants in religion, and he can't find it nowhere else.

"But see! Marthy is callin' us, and the dinner is ready. We haven't much to offer, but if your appetite is whetted by this keen air we'll enjoy what there is. Parson, will you ask a blessin'?"

V.

IS IT A VALE OF TEARS?

AFTER a rather lugubrious "Good-evenin', Marthy Golf," Cynthia Griffin laid her sun-bonnet on the table and sat down with an air of general weariness. She had pretty nearly everything that is absolutely necessary to human happiness, but seemed to think it a duty to be miserable. Tom, her husband, was a good-natured fellow, who did not go to church as often as he should, partly, I fear, because his anxious wife constantly reminded him that he and she and all the rest of mankind had nothing to fear so much as the terrors of the Lord. He unconsciously reasoned with himself that if there was no hope for the future he might as well have as good a time as possible in the present life. A well-to-do workman, with two dollars

a day, he had a cozy little house of his own, a small mortgage on it of four hundred dollars, and a couple of children who chirped when he came home like a couple of young thrushes.

Cynthia had a saturnine temperament. That was not her fault, but it was certainly a great misfortune. She had a fixed habit of always looking for and dwelling on the dark side — was one of that class of Christians who make their religion as disagreeable and discouraging as possible, the class who prefer a drizzling rain to sunshine. If you said to her, "Cynthia, it's a lovely day," she would instantly reply, "Yes, but it's brewin' a storm." She never quite managed to get the feeling into her heart that God is our Father; she was afraid of Him, and lived in constant expectation of some calamity. The Lord's Prayer did not convey any idea to her mind, but some of the Psalms of David stimulated her imagination and at the same time depressed her. Her faith, if the word can be properly used in such cases, was of the

somber sort, which tends to make the conscientious timid and heavy-hearted, and all others indifferent.

She had so often reminded Tom that life is nothing but a vale of tears, that he went altogether too frequently to the corner saloon to drown his grief over the fact. He would regard it as presumption to contradict her, for was not she a member of the church, while he was a brand not yet plucked from the burning? He had long ago begun to feel that religion and personal discomfort are as closely allied as cause and effect. He was willing to admit that religion is absolutely necessary, but regarded it as something to be postponed to old age, when the tombstones in the churchyard become unpleasantly suggestive.

When Cynthia had ensconced herself in an arm-chair, Martha placed by her side a glass of fresh milk and some crullers. She enjoyed the little collation, and munched the crullers with a keen appetite, but could not quite repress the

feeling that enjoyment of any kind was to some extent sinful. She managed, however, to dispose of both crullers and milk, and then took out her knitting with the air of one who has committed a misdeed, and after a long-drawn sigh made her usual remark about the vale of tears.

Hiram had taken in the scene from his shoemaker's bench, and seemed to enjoy it. He chuckled to himself as he drove in the next half dozen pegs, but could not help saying:

"Cynthy, was that milk sour?"

"Why, Hiram, it was jest as sweet as could be," was the reply.

"And was the crullers to your taste, Cynthy? I hope Marthy hasn't been passin' off any of day-before-yesterday's crullers on a neighbor."

"They was jest splendid, Hiram. Cooked this mornin', wasn't they, Marthy?"

The housewife nodded, and her mouth twitched quizzically, for she was accustomed to Hiram's peculiarities.

"Got the dyspepsy, Cynthy?" persisted Hiram.

"Not as I know of; why, Hiram?"

"'Cos the minute you swallered them things they seemed to disagree with you, and you said that eatin' crullers and drinkin' sweet milk was a vale of tears."

"No, Hiram Golf, I didn't mean that, and you know I didn't; but I think it's always well to keep in mind that the enjoyments of this life is jest vanity of vanities, that's all."

"'Tain't so, Cynthy, 'tain't so. That sentiment ain't founded in fact, and it ain't authorized by the Lord. There's no use to put on a pair of blue spectacles to look at the gifts of God with."

The poor woman was startled, and came very near dropping a stitch.

"When I hear you talkin' in that way, Cynthy," resumed Hiram, "I wonder if some fatal accident has happened to the Holy Spirit that I don't know nothin' about. A vale of tears?

Wall, yes, it is to some people, but to the soul that is in Christ, and feels as safe as your baby does when it is in your arms, the world is so full of beauty and gladness that we can't see no end to 'em.

"Now, Cynthy," and Hiram took up another shoe and examined it carefully, "you think too much about your poor miserable self, and too little about God. I've knowed you for a long ten year, and nobody can say but you're a good woman and a good mother. Why are you always afraid that somethin' will happen to God so He can't do what He says He will? That's what ails you, and it's jest as much a disease as the mumps, and it's about as painful."

At that moment, under cover of the darkness, a forlorn, haggard-looking tramp came up the steps, hat in hand. He was a woe-begone creature, young in years, old in experience, and his glance was furtive, like that of a hunted animal who expected the dogs to pounce upon him at any moment.

"Mister, will you give me something to eat?" he half whispered. "I'm dreadful hungry."

"Wall, my boy," said Hiram, after surveying him for a moment, "you do look as though you'd had a rough time. Here, sit down. Hungry, be ye? Come, Marthy, bustle round and get a slice of that cold ham we had for dinner"—the tramp's eyes opened wide—"and bring a nice bowl of bread-and-milk." The tramp apparently thought he had suddenly entered a suburb of Paradise.

He was really half famished, and bolted the food with the feeling that the plate, and the ham, and Hiram, and the wife might disappear at any instant, and leave him in the wilderness from which he had just emerged.

The shoemaker sat looking at him. What was there about this forlorn wretch which recalled a robbery that had been committed two days before in Green Meadow? Was it that the tramp was all ablaze with the crime, and a sensitive nature like Hiram's could smell the

smoke thereof? The transmission of thought is a mystery, but also a fact. Hiram was impressed with that idea, and a great pity filled his heart. "Perhaps," he thought, "that younglin' has a mother who is at this very minute lookin' out of the winder and wonderin' where her boy is wanderin'; or perhaps there is a father who would give all he owns to save his wayward child." Hiram's eyes became moist.

"That was a sad affair at Green Meadow on Tuesday, wasn't it?" he remarked casually.

The tramp dropped the piece of bread he held in his hand, and stared at the speaker. The bullet had hit the mark, and you could hear the impact as it struck.

"Yes, you must know about it," he continued. "It's the talk of all the country round. He broke into a house, they say, and carried off some money which the poor farmer had laid up for a rainy day. But that money won't do the robber no good. It'll burn a hole in his pockets, I reckon."

The tramp's eyes turned restlessly from one person to another. "Do they know what I know?" he seemed to be saying to himself. "Will they inform on me? The old man's a cripple, and I could master him easily enough. But if these two women should scream! The woods are a mile and a half away, and I should have to run for it." He looked at Martha and at Cynthia with a quick, inquiring glance. His appetite was gone. Another mouthful of that ham would have choked him. Did he tremble with cold? No, the evening was warm, and the wind was from the south. Then his chest heaved and his lips quivered, and he could hardly contain himself. An expression of agony stole over his face, and he moved restlessly in the chair.

"I'm sorry for that young man," said Hiram. "I ruther guess he must have had a great temptation, and couldn't resist it. It's so much better, though, to be honest. Money that's earned is all right; money that's stolen ain't no

good. Then, maybe, the robber was hungry, jest as you are. The world had gone terrible hard with him — who knows? Perhaps he tried to get work and failed. Now he'll be caught and go to jail, and the old home with the father and mother in it — "

That seemed to be too much for the tramp. He reached down, got his fingers on his slouch hat, sprang like a frightened doe from the veranda, and disappeared in the darkness. Hiram's specters were giving him chase. The chair was empty, the food was only half eaten, and a groan filled the air.

Hiram said sadly, " I wasn't mistook." Then he turned to Cynthia, who had noticed the proceedings with something like terror, and remarked, " Cynthy, you are quite right: under certain circumstances this life is a vale of tears, and it can't be made nothin' else. I reckon it's about that to the poor feller who couldn't stop to eat his vittles. But is it God's fault, Cynthy, or is it his own? Did God make it a vale of

tears, or is it the devil's work? That's what I want to know. It's sin in the heart that makes life a failure. There ain't no stars in the sky for that tramp; it's a thunderin' and light'nin' all the time. I shouldn't blame him one bit if he was to sigh, jest as you do, and talk about the terrors of the Lord. He'll find 'em all out before he gets through. 'Tain't in natur that he should sleep easy. He's travelin' a boggy road, and will bring up with a broken axle after a while. But what business have you, with a house, a husband and children, and trust in the Lord, what business have you to go whimperin' along as though you was out in a drivin' rain without no umbrella, and no hope of reachin' a shelter?"

Fifteen minutes later John Jessig joined the little company.

"I'm not making visits at this time of night, Hiram," he said, "but I heard your cheery voice as I was passing, and concluded to stop in for a bit. What a beautiful night it is! One

of the nights when the 'heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork.' I think I never saw so many stars before. They are at a mass meeting, I imagine, and there's hardly room for them all."

"Yes, I've been watchin' 'em," responded Hiram. "It's one of them nights when a man can't hold himself in. He feels so small and insignificant, and he wants to say so much that he hain't got words to express. It reminds me of the time when Zadok anointed Solomon king, and when 'the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.' I tell you, parson, I'd like to be at that meetin' of the stars up yonder, for I'm chock full of rejoicin'. I'm thankful for pretty near everythin', includin' my rheumatism. I don't see how folks can grumble at the Lord on such a night as this. It makes such a grand picter of where we're goin' to be."

"Religion," said John, "is certainly intended to make us contented with our lot."

"That's jest what I've been tellin' Cynthy here. When a man's religion don't make him cheerful, he's got hold of the wrong bottle. He'd better break it, and get another one."

"Wall, it seems to me, Hiram," broke in Cynthia, "that you haven't sech a great sight to boast about. You're only a poor man anyhow, and —"

"A poor man, am I? I tell you, Cynthy Griffin, I'm one of the richest men in the world."

"Oh, you be, Hiram! I didn't know it, and I guess there's lots of other folks that don't know it too." There was something contemptuous in her tones.

"Yes, indeed I'm rich. Look at the sky up there! Ain't that mine? Don't I have the use of it while I live?"

"Maybe, Hiram, but I shouldn't say I owned it unless I had a better title than you have."

"No, I don't exactly own it, but then my Father owns it, and what my Father owns I have a right to enjoy."

Cynthia began to knit very vigorously. After rocking back and forth with some violence, she tossed her head in the air, and remarked, "Seems to me that you're talkin' nonsense, Hiram." Then she looked with a side glance at John for corroboration.

"And I own the Cheroquee," continued Hiram, "and can fill myself full of the scenery along its banks all the year round; and I own the whole range of hills over yonder that the sun creeps behind every afternoon. I watch the crimson glory of God siftin' though the trees, and lift my eyes to the clouds that drop down the west like a veil over the face of a bride, and can't hardly contain myself. 'The earth and the fullness thereof' is a part of my inheritance. No matter how many dollars I might have, I couldn't buy as much scenery as I own now as a free gift."

The minister nodded approval. He never interrupted the shoemaker when he was in such

a mood as this. On the contrary, he felt that the pupil was teaching the teacher, and was gratefully silent.

"Besides all that," said Hiram, aglow with his own thoughts, and speaking with the eloquence of one of Israel's prophets, "I've got this little home, and a grown-up boy who is doin' well out in Montana, and all the work I can do, and all the clothes I want to wear — two whole suits for every day and an extra nice one for Sundays — and all the vittles I can eat. I ain't never too hot in summer, for there's always a breeze comin' across the river, jest like now; and I ain't cold in winter, because I can crawl up close to the stove. Now what more can any reasonable man ask for?"

"I'd like to try my hand at askin'," sneered Cynthia, "if there was any use in it, but I s'pose there ain't."

"Them is only the beginnin' of my possessions," continued Hiram, without heeding

"Oh, there's more, is there?" and Cynthia shrugged her shoulders. "More of the same sort, I reckon."

"In the last will and testament of my Saviour," said Hiram, "I'm made legal heir to the immortal life. That dockiment is very vallible to me. 'In My Father's house,' He says, 'are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.' So I've got a place here, and a place there; a house on the earth, and a home in heaven. This great gift is deeded to me, and guaranteed. The title to it can't be disputed in no court."

"I should say you was one of them visionaries," curtly broke in Cynthia.

"If I get down-hearted, a Voice says, 'Let not your heart be troubled.' I listen, and listen, and listen, and by and by it says again, 'I will be with you alway, even to the end of the world.' God and me! Can you reckon up how much that is worth?

"Now then, parson, I ask you this plain

question: Ain't religion sometimes like magic? It does the impossible, and it gives us the one thing we want more than anythin' else. There's so much to it that once in a while I'm afraid I'll wake up and find I've been dreamin'. And when I do wake up, it's bigger, and broader, and higher, and more glorious than ever. I begin to laugh when I begin to cry, for it turns all my groanin' into praise. Jest think of it! All these things actually belong to me, and nobody can't dispossess me. They belong to jest me, Hiram Golf, shoemaker by the grace of God, and at present livin' in the little manufacturin' village of Woodbine, with heaven in full view from my cottage winder."

The spell of Hiram's voice, and the profound earnestness with which he spoke, charmed even Cynthia into silence, while the parson's eyes and heart were both full.

"Why," cried Hiram, "I've got so much ahead of me that I'm almost dizzy with gratitude! It is so wonderful, so unexpected, so

undeserved! Don't you think I can walk a little while on this poor crutch, when I look forward to a new body, a new life, renewed youth, and the splendor of God, which no eye can bear? Shall I grumble at the small inconveniences of this present time? No, parson; no, Cynthy! With every peg I drive into a shoe I cry, 'Glory, glory!' When I close my tired eyes at night, I say to myself, 'The journey is nearin' its end, and then — ah, then!'

"That's what I call religion. I've got only a taste of it on the tip of my tongue; but what will it be when I drink it as the thirsty traveler drinks from the bucket at the well? I only see a corner of the battlements; but how shall I feel when I 'hold them in full survey'?"

Then, as though he could bear it no longer, or as though language had failed to express his thoughts, he caught up his crutch, and, beating time with it, broke into song. The hymn was a familiar one, and at the third line John joined him. At the second verse even Cynthia caught

the glorious infection, and her thin and piping voice was added.

It was a revelation. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," you would have said if you had passed by at that moment. Religion! It is the gift of gifts, the legerdemain of life. It doubles our joys, and lightens our burdens. The secret of all happiness is in its hands. The lowliest life is made radiant by it, for under its benign influence poverty forgets itself and drudgery becomes endurable.

As John went home that night he felt that he had been in goodly company, and that the ministry of the Gospel is the grandest work in which the mind and heart of man can engage.

VI.

"A LITTLE MAN SAVIN' SOULS."

THERE is a providence in all the incidents of human life. Unseen hands lead us, and invisible eyes watch for an opportunity to afford the assistance we need. No man works alone. His apparent solitude is peopled with a delegation from the angelic host, who stand ready to lift him up when he stumbles, and direct him when he is confused. Sometimes a casual word uttered by a stranger or a neighbor is the golden key to unlock the problem that has puzzled us, or it may be a look, or a smile, or a tear. Chance? Coincidence? No, it is God's guardian care. He who notes the sparrow's fall is not unmindful of a pain in our hearts or a doubt in our minds.

John Jessig had received a call, and his little

household was filled with excitement. The call was a very flattering incident, and neither John nor any one else, in the pulpit or out of it, can be wholly indifferent to a matter of that kind. He pondered deeply, took a long walk across the fields, telling this great secret over and over again to his soul, while his face glowed with appreciation of the compliment implied, then stood for a full hour on the bridge which spans the Cheroquee, thinking, thinking, but reaching no conclusion.

A more important parish, from a worldly point of view, had expressed the unanimous desire to obtain his services. He would have a much larger salary, for the people in Woodbine were poor, and he was sometimes pinched. Besides this, he would have an opportunity to make himself better known — a factor in the problem which appealed to his personal ambition. Woodbine was in a corner, but the new church was on a hill-top.

"Shouldn't a man make the most of himself?"

reasoned John. "Isn't it right, nay, isn't it a duty, to preach the Gospel in a place where the thunderous reverberations will be heard throughout a wide area?"

But he hesitated. A thousand conflicting emotions, some laudable and others not so praiseworthy, chased each other through his mind. A solemn question had fallen to his lot, and its solution could not be long delayed. The committee who had visited him had quoted the passage about hiding one's light under a bushel, had intimated that a much less gifted man would serve the purpose in Woodbine, had candidly declared that the new parish would open up a very much larger field, and that he had been accounted just the man to do brave work there.

If his pulse ran up into the nineties, need we wonder? There is a good deal to be said on both sides of such a subject, and John may be excused if he walked up and down that rickety bridge looking for light. At last, in utter confusion of heart, he sauntered along the narrow

street leading to the village, knocked at Hiram's door, was warmly welcomed as usual, and took a seat in the dingy shop.

"Parson," began Hiram, "there is too many Christians who are anxious to do somethin' great for God, and too few who are willin' to do somethin' little."

That was a strange chord to strike at such a time, and John simply looked the interrogation he could not utter.

"Yes," continued Hiram, as he drove the pegs with unwonted rapidity, "the hardest work a man ever does is to glorify the little things of life."

John became thoughtful. "You have hold of a mighty puzzle, Hiram," he said at length. "A great enterprise evolves great courage and makes great deeds possible, but I sometimes think that a man is just as acceptable to God if he is contented with a narrow lot and fills it full of the riches of Christ."

"Parson," said Hiram, laying his hammer on

his lap and looking at John with an earnest gaze, "if you could make the people believe that, you'd fetch the millennium along in about two weeks. They can't see it, though — not yet."

"If I wanted to organize a band of missionaries," John continued, "to go to some distant spot on the earth where they would encounter untold dangers, and possibly give their lives for the cause, I could —"

"Wall," broke in Hiram, "you could recruit a large number within a stone's-throw of my workbench."

"I think I know at least a dozen devoted people who would be glad of the opportunity."

"That's so, parson. But if you want 'em to check their tempers for God's sake, and wash the dishes with salvation in view, they would toss their heads in the air. Human natur is laborin' under a great mistake. Men and women is willin' to die for the Lord, but somehow they're not ready to live for Him. You can get folks enough to risk everythin' for the Lord

under extraordinary circumstances who can't make up their minds to live for Him under circumstances that is only ordinary. In my jedgment, the best test of man's conversion is found in the way he handles the drudgery of every day. If he can stand up aginst that and hold his own, he can stand up aginst anythin' that's likely to come.

"Now then, take my shoemakin' for an example. 'Tain't much,' says the world. 'Hiram Golf don't amount to nothin' anyway.' But if I do it with the feelin' that God is sayin' to me, 'Hiram, I have sot you to makin' shoes, and I want you to make 'em good; don't put no paper in the soles, for the sake of a little extra profit; and see that your uppers is well tanned — do that, and I'll see that you get to heaven,' if I work with that in mind, ain't I a pretty good-sized man in the sight of the angels?

"Every time I pull a thread I want to say to myself, 'There! that stitch will hold; I've put my religion into it.' And every time I drive a

peg I try to drive it home so it'll stay in place. I want to feel that I can look at the man who wears them shoes without makin' no excuses for myself. The sole and the upper must be jined together like a man and wife in marriage, and a divorce in muddy weather is entirely out of the question."

"I see what you mean, Hiram," said John, "and I entirely agree with you. It is more important to do little things well than to waste time in hunting for some great thing that can't be found."

"Yes, parson, and more reel religion in bakin' a loaf of sweet bread than in goin' to a church meetin' and lettin' the bread get sour. The Christianity of a clean, wholesome, and well-regulated home is of more consequence than most folks thinks. The general notion is that religion is up in the air, among the clouds, but I don't believe it, and I don't read my Bible that way. My kind of religion don't scuttle out of sight at sundown on Sunday evenin', come

back again for an hour or two to the Wednesday prayer-meetin', and then disappear until the church-bells ring on the next Sunday mornin'. All that is a delusion and a snare. No religion is wuth havin' unless a man sticks to it in a horse trade, or when he's paintin' a barn; and if a professor sands his sugar and waters his milk, he's goin' to have a tough time when certain unfort'nate questions is asked by the Lord."

"I sometimes think," said John, as though talking to himself — "I sometimes think that in the Providence of God there is nothing small, that everything is great."

"You're not fur off from the truth, parson. Now, excuse me if I am personal; I don't mean no disrespect, and you won't feel offended. Take yourself, for instance. You are a young man, and you are preachin' in a little manufacturin' village that couldn't be seen on a map without a microscope. In the eyes of the world you ain't of no consequence whatever. Your field is a narrer one, and although you're a

faithful pastor you haven't anythin' like fame. Nobody beyond the hills ever heard of you, and I don't care much whether they ever do hear of you.

"You're a little man in a little place. But, my dear son," the shoemaker's eyes glistened with excitement, "you are savin' souls. You worked over poor Bill Handy till you dragged him away from his cups. You're the friend of every workin'man in the mills; you went to the employers in the last strike, when things was red-hot, and we was on the edge of a revolution — persuaded them to make certain concessions in the name of justice and fair play, and ever since matters has gone on smooth and proper.

"A little man in a little place, savin' souls! A little man in a little place, makin' things clean and wholesome! People can't see us, we are so hidden away. No matter. Who cares? When you get to heaven, them eloquent ministers who have preached in large cities to

big congregations will look at you and say, 'Hullo, little man, where do you hail from?' They'll make your acquaintance for the fust time, but my word for it, John Jessig, they'll be glad to know you.

"When the Lord comes along and looks over His Kingdom, do you think He's goin' to pay special attention to them famous men and neglect you? He will say to them, 'Show me what you've done down there in the city, where you had a nice house, and a fine library, and all the comforts of life'; and He'll say to you, 'John Jessig, I put you down there by the Cheroquee River, because there was work to be done among those mill hands.' It won't do, parson, for them ministers to put on airs. They've got to show results, and you've got to do the same.

"A soul in New York ain't wuth no more than a soul in Woodbine. A rich man's soul ain't wuth no more than a shoemaker's soul, or a blacksmith's soul. A soul is a soul, the world

over, and if you've saved one the Lord won't ask whether it lived on the back street or up on the avenue.

"There ain't nothin' small that God condescends to look at. His lookin' at it makes it great."

John became excited, and his hands trembled. He thought he heard the voice of the Lord in that conversation. He looked at Hiram with indescribable tenderness. It is a marvelous thing to see a man on fire, and the shoemaker was all ablaze. He had unconsciously reduced human motives to their last analysis, had proven to himself and to John that the small duties of life are important, and he seemed to be filled with the divine fury of that eloquence of which every earnest man is capable in supreme moments.

Then John shook Hiram's hand warmly, and said, "Hiram, it is always great to live near to God. One never feels small when heaven is the price to be paid for his work. It makes no difference where a man is placed. If he gath-

ers his golden sheaf of ripe grain, and carries it to the Gate, he is sure of a welcome. What more can he ask?

"I have sometimes grown despondent, situated as I am in this out-of-the-way village, but you have cheered and helped me. It isn't the size of the field we till, but the work we put into it, that is important. A large soul makes everything large. It is a great lesson to learn, and I think I have learned it. The dear Lord is here as well as elsewhere, and if we are in His company what matters it that we are deprived of other things? I am willing to seem small to men, if the Lord will not think me so. Good-night, my dear brother."

When John reached home he said quietly, "Mary, I've been thinking about that call."

"Yes, John?"

"And have concluded to stay here in Woodbine."

Mary put her arms about her husband's neck, and said, "I'm glad of it, John. We've been very happy here."

VII.

FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN.

No man can ever know how many friends he has until he is either sick or dying. The tender regard or the robust respect which may exist throughout the community seems to keep under cover, as though it were evidence of weakness to show itself until something unexpected or extraordinary happens, and then it suddenly blossoms into manifestation with touching and pathetic eagerness. While one is in health and vigorously making himself felt by his fellowmen, he is entirely unconscious that he is held in such affection that no plummet can sound its depth; but when the unforeseen occurs, and he drops out of the competitive struggle, it breaks forth like sunshine on an April day.

Hiram Golf was a more important element of

village life in Woodbine than either he or any one else dreamed. His value was discovered only after his exit. He passed most of his time in quiet seclusion, and never intruded his counsel. But on every public occasion he rose to leadership by the force of social gravitation. His strong common sense, his absolute fairness of judgment, his lack of mere fanaticism, his personal independence and the rather reckless manner in which he asserted it, his boldness in criticising both men and measures, made him a marked man. No debate was concluded until his voice had been heard, for he had a pungent way of stating a case, and a forceful though somewhat rude eloquence, which threw him to the front in every emergency.

Of course he had enemies. Opinions are not worth much unless they kindle opposition, and men who see things from circumference to center, and tell their thoughts with perfect frankness, are likely to be misunderstood. Some called him a crank, and ventured to protest

against his freedom of speech. Others attributed to him, during the heat of discussion, motives which he would have disdained to cherish.

And of course he had friends, a multitude, both in Woodbine and among the angelic host, for he was a manly man, with a conscience as well as a brain. The poor people adored him, for his unobtrusive charity had stood them in good stead in many a pinching hour of need. Had he and they lived in the olden time and in the suburbs of ancient Athens, they would have regarded him as a blood relation of the gods on high Olympus, for there was a dignity in his utterance and a latent authority in his advice which were like a hand of iron in a glove of velvet.

It was generally conceded that, though somewhat eccentric, he was a man of ideas; that he was in deadly earnest both in his work and in his religion; and that he lived like one who was engaged in the inspiring task of laying up treas-

ures in heaven with the full belief that his books would be carefully examined and his future decided by the accountant's verdict. He asked nothing except an honest laborer's wages for the present life and a grass-plot in the graveyard when his toil was ended, looked every one squarely in the face, and had nothing to conceal. In other words, he was the happy possessor of that omnipotent and magical something known as character.

Hiram, the shoemaker, was one of God's noblemen; and when Death, with unwilling footsteps, walked across that little veranda, on which his victim had sat during so many summer evenings with a kindly word for every passer-by, and knocked at the kitchen door, he seemed sorry that he had to perform so unwelcome a duty. Yes, Death felt that he had a mournful task, and hesitated.

But Hiram, as he lay on his couch, received this strange visitor with the affable courtesy of a Christian. He wanted to live a little longer,

because, as he said to John Jessig, there were some things which he would like to attend to personally. "But still," he added, with a languid smile, "if the Lord has made different arrangements it's all right, and He will find some one else to look after these matters."

When Jonas Crimp, a wood-cutter, blind of one eye, with a wife and four children dependent upon him, called at the Golf cottage and insisted upon seeing Hiram, because it might be the last time, as he told Martha, the sufferer heard his voice and cried, "Let him come in, wife."

The poor fellow brushed away a tear with his rough and calloused hand as he said, "Hiram, you made a man of me. I was gone in drink, and the children was well-nigh starvin'. I felt a coldness at my heart, for the world was on top of me, holdin' me down, and I got desperate. Never a kind word from any one but you, Hiram. They all let go of me, and I don't blame 'em; but you hung on, and here I am on my feet again."

Hiram's eyes lighted up. His lips trembled, and so did his voice. "When I get up yonder, Jonas," he whispered, "may I tell 'em what you say? May I ask 'em to send some investigatin' angel down to Woodbine to call on you, Jonas Crimp? for I may need to prove that I have not been an unprofitable servant. I shall be there to-morrow, or the next day, Jonas, and if I can tell the Lord what you say it will be a great comfort."

Two hours later, during which he had slept restlessly, he exclaimed, "Oh, what a blessed thing it is to do good!" He was still thinking of Jonas, and the wood-cutter's words were ringing in his heart like a chime of bells. "Oh, what a privilege to bring a soul out of darkness into light!" He looked upward with enraptured glance, as though the ceiling and the roof had disappeared and he were gazing at the starry heavens. "To be able to do God a real service!" he murmured. "To be a co-worker with Christ! To preach to the lost, the lost, the lost,

until their sins are blotted out by tears of repentance! Ah, parson," and he turned to John, who sat by his side, "that makes life worth livin'."

He was exhausted by the effort, and, turning on his side, fell once more into slumber. But his lips still moved, and a smile played about them, as though he were listening again to what Jonas had said.

When John took Hiram's poor, thin hand in his, and in a voice broken by emotion repeated the words of David, "'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,'" the patient sufferer finished the quotation: "'For Thou art with me,'" and there he hesitated for an instant. Then he began again, "'For thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' Yes, parson," he added, "I have often thought of this hour, and wondered how I should stand the ordeal. You see, my good friend, that I am dyin' very comfortably."

"Still cheerful, Hiram, still cheerful," and John was so bowed down by personal grief that he spoke with difficulty.

Hiram pressed John's hand gently, and replied, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, alway, alway. I am able to do that, parson, and it seems easy to do it, easier than I feared it might be. There's only a short road behind me, though I've lived more'n sixty year, and a part of it lies through darkness; but there's a long road ahead, and its brightness — O parson, I can't describe it. What a good-natured creature Death is after all! We've made a mistake about him. He isn't what we have thought him, John Jessig. He's gentler, and kinder, and more considerate. See how smooth he's makin' my path! I'm goin' on, and on, and on, and when him and me stand on the other shore, and he tells me to follow the shinin' Cross and I'll reach the City, I'll say to him, 'Dear Death, you have done for me more than life ever did or could do. I want to apologize for some hard thoughts I've had about

you.' Yes, parson, there's nothin' half so easy as dyin' when by dyin' you reach the home where there ain't no more tears and no more night."

At midnight Hiram woke after troubled sleep. His breathing was a little heavier than usual, and he was evidently affected by some strong emotion.

"I have seen Him!" he whispered.

"Seen whom, Hiram?" asked John.

"Him! How wonderful! I fear I am almost impatient to have it over with. But it can't last long now. A few hours more, only a few hours more — and then!"

"Him?" and John's cheeks grew pale. He too was laboring under a great deal of excitement.

"Yes, the Saviour! My dear Lord! He stood on the farther bank of a narrer stream, but it was deep and black, and beckoned to me. He is waitin' for me, parson. Think of it! The Lord is there waitin' for the shoemaker!

Oh, that face! Those robes of light! There wasn't no look of sorrer nor even of pity on His face, but an expression of welcome. He seemed to be glad that my workin' days is ended, glad that I am to have a new body, glad that I am to be young again."

"Then, Hiram, you are not sorry that heaven is so close at hand? You have no desire to come back, my friend?"

"Come back?" and there was a look of pain on Hiram's face at the thought. "Come back?" he said feebly. "Parson, don't speak of sech a thing! I have seen too much to want to stay here any longer. I know now why the sight of heaven is hid from us. We couldn't bear it. No one sees it until he is where I am. It is better so. We should be unwillin' to live unless we was kept in ignorance. The longin' to go would make us restless and unhappy. When one sees what I have seen, he can't stay no longer. 'As the hart pants for the water-brooks, so panteth my soul for Thee, O God!'

"What are them?" he asked a little later on.

"Some wild flowers, Hiram, which Jane Green brought you. She gathered them in the woods half-way up the hills."

"Ah yes, ah yes. Let me take 'em in my hand. It will be my last look at the beautiful things of the earth."

He held them tremulously for a moment. "Poor Jane!" he said. "God bless the good woman. She was down-hearted, with two sick children, and nothing laid by for the rent. It was very kind of her to think of me."

The morning dawned bright and clear. John looked out of the cottage window and watched the stars as they grew paler and paler, while the sun crept up to the hill-tops, as though saying its cheery good-morning to the awakened villagers. A cool and gentle breeze broke the surface of the lazy Cheroquee into ripples, and a gossamer tissue of mist rose from the meadows, half frightened at the sudden appearance of that imperious and blazing orb.

This was John's first experience with death. His mother had died while he was still in his cradle, but his father remained, a hale and hearty old man of nearly seventy-five. Brothers and sisters he had none, and when from time to time some relative of the family had withdrawn the veil and entered the mysterious land, it seemed a far-away incident, unconnected with any severe sense of personal loss. But here was a very close friend, humble as the world goes, noble as God reckons, whose hand was on the very door of the tomb, and who was about to enter in the serene faith that he would be roused from sleep by angels and conducted to a radiant home far away from the ills of this present life. He was mentally impressed and morally subdued by the strange spectacle. Words failed him, but his heart and his eyes were full. The Sabbath-day of a soul was dawning. He could almost hear the echo of that chorus with which the faithful are awakened, and yet was startled into something like

exaltation by the thought that Hiram, sure of himself, without even a lingering doubt, was not merely ready for the summons, but was listening for it with something like eagerness. His attitude was not that of a man who bends under a heavy burden, and cries, "Thy will be done," but of one who is glad to step from darkness into light, from the weariness of the body into the rest of immortality, and who transfigures Death by warmly grasping his hand and saying, "Thank you!" John marveled in spite of himself. He had expected much, but not quite this. "Religion can do many things," he said to himself, as he looked out upon the reddening clouds in the east, "but to do this! Ah, how wonderful, how glorious it is!"

Martha was sitting by her husband's side. John had insisted on watching with him, and the wife had stolen a few hours of unwilling and hardly restful sleep. Twice she had risen during the night and peered through the doorway, but John nodded his head to assure her that all was

well, and motioned her back. With the first streaks of morning her eyes opened wide and refused to close again. She could no longer stay away from the patient man by whose side she had traveled for many, many years of life's strange journey, and so sat there, gazing at that wan face, her eyes dry, but her heart beating its sad requiem.

Hiram woke as a ray of sunlight fell on his face.

"Marthy," he whispered, and there was a pathetic tenderness in his voice.

"Yes, Hiram."

He lifted his hand and pointed upward. "It's not fur now, dear wife, not fur. I am pretty well tired out, but I'm happy and expectin'. My Father's mansion! They're openin' the gates! Jest a little while and you'll come too, Marthy. Don't be nervous when you hear 'em call. We've grown old together, Marthy. Blessed years! A little trouble and misgivin' once in a while, but it don't seem nothin' now. Tell our boy my last

thoughts was of him. I don't care if he grows rich, say, but ah, if he keeps good! Be sure and tell him that. I shall see you and him on the other side, but you fust, I hope. When you come, don't be in the leastwise timid. Some of us will be right there to meet you, and I guess the Lord'll let me be among them that says good-mornin'!"

John saw that the end was rapidly approaching, and in low tones, mellowed by his grief, he repeated the Lord's Prayer, Hiram, with eyes closed and hands folded across his heart, uniting in the little service. The dying shoemaker was as calm as one who is about to start on a journey, his trunks all packed, hat in hand, standing at the doorway and waiting for the tramp of the horses' feet. As to fear, he had none. His triumphant faith had sustained him during many a hard trial, and it was quite sufficient for the present emergency.

"You will soon be with God, my dear brother," said John.

Hiram turned his eyes wearily on the speaker's face, and still true to his old self, and still quaint as ever, replied, "Parson, I have been with Him all my life."

"You will soon be in heaven, Hiram — that is what I mean."

"Yes, in heaven!" was the feeble response, and a strange and beautiful smile irradiated his face. "Yes, in heaven! and soon! This pain ain't easy to bear, because I'm growin' weaker, but it can't last much longer. My soul is loosenin' its chains. I can hear 'em as they drop, one by one. Then I shall be free, free!"

Then occurred an incident which afterward furnished John with many a thoughtful hour. I have pondered over his description of it, and it has seemed more and more wonderful. And yet, why should I think it marvelous? Is not the world full of experiences which strike us with awe — experiences the very remembrance of which fills the eyes with tears and the heart with wonder? Cannot every household which

has been visited by Death duplicate what happened in that lowly cottage on the outskirts of Woodbine? Mothers who have nursed their children until the Lord took them to His arms, husbands who have watched through the still hours by the bedside of the dying wife, will tell you that the last hours are sometimes filled with startling revelations which show that the other world and this one are so close to each other that it is but a single step across the boundary. The departing enjoy privileges which are not vouchsafed to the rest of us. They see sights and hear sounds to which others' eyes are blind and others' ears are deaf.

While John was still holding Hiram's hand and the good wife was tearfully leaning over him, he gave a quick, convulsive sob. It was apparently the last effort of expiring nature. The perfume of the morning crept through the open window, and the splendor of the sun filled the room and made fantastic figures on the carpet. That sob was not only portentous, but

thrilling. The cheeks of the onlookers grew pale, and their hearts stood still, for death, when undoing the last chains of bondage, produces an effect which is almost terrifying. One cannot speak, he simply waits. The all-conqueror is present, and seems to be both impatient and inexorable.

A convulsive sob! Then came that ominous exhalation, like a long-drawn sigh, as though the soul in its extremity were loth to part with the body in which it had lived so long — a sigh of pity for those who are left, a sigh of relief that all is over, the good-by of the spirit as it closes the door of earth and enters heaven.

John and Martha were motionless, spellbound. Neither uttered a word for a full minute. They looked at each other, and each wondered whether the other knew that Hiram was no longer there.

At last John hoarsely whispered, "He has gone! God's will be done."

There was no reply, unless, indeed, the sob of a breaking heart was a reply.

But see! The eyelids are moving and the lips are trembling. What can it mean? He has not gone yet! Not quite yet! The sleeper is about to wake. Slowly, oh, so slowly, those eyelids part, and Hiram gazes about the room like one who has been looking at a bright light and can hardly trust himself. He does not at once recall those dear ones at his side, but scans their faces like one trying to catch the clue of memory and is hardly able to do so. Then comes a sudden gleam of recognition, and a smile rests on his lips.

"I thought — I — I thought —" he begins, in tones which seem like an echo, and then stops, as though the effort to speak were too great, or as though the soul, having once surrendered its control of the body, finds it difficult to regain it.

"Yes, yes, Hiram," said John, stooping low over the sufferer.

"Why, how strange all this is!" he murmured

"Is that you, parson? And that is my Marthy? I thought I was in heaven! I was among the angels! I saw — I saw — and now I am here again. Ah, they're comin' once more! Can't you see 'em? How many, many there be! The bells is ringin'. And those voices! They are callin', callin', callin'. Good-by, good — "

Then the eyes closed for the last time, and all was still. Death had completed his task, and borne his prize to the other shore. Hiram had crossed the border, and would return no more.

And yet the sun shone! Not in mockery of human sorrow, I ween, for there is neither indifference nor sarcasm in nature, but in glad welcome to the new-born soul that was taking its first few steps in the glorious journey to the Throne. Yes, the sun shone! The world must go on whether men live or die. And it seemed a symbol of that holy faith which lightens the dark places of earth and fills with divine radiance even the dark valley.

Two years later I visited Woodbine, and my old classmate, John Jessig. The conversation naturally turned to my own struggles and h since our college days, and then he told me thi story.

"Let us make a pilgrimage to his grave," he said.

There it was, in a grassy corner of the little churchyard, a bright and cheerful spot for one's body to rest in.

I read these words on the tombstone:

"*Hiram Golf, shoemaker by the grace of God.*"

"He would have it so," said John. "It was one of his last requests. He believed that all work is God's work."

"And it was your privilege to minister to his faith in holy things, John."

"Yes, but it was also his privilege to minister to mine. I gave him little, he gave me much. He was a priest without the robes of office, a humble laborer in the vineyard, an honest crea-

ture, a true friend. His life was incarnate Christianity. His death — well, my dear boy, such as he never die. The villagers remember him with gratitude, and speak of him often. He is of the few who enjoy two immortalities, one there and one here. Would there were more like him."

THE END.